

# The Merchant of Venice

William Shakespeare

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# Activities

## Before reading

The Merchant of Venice, Antonio, is rich, but his money is at sea in his ships. When Antonio's friend, Bassanio, asks him for money to help find a wife, the merchant visits Shylock, the moneylender. But Shylock doesn't like Antonio, and he asks the merchant to sign a paper saying what will happen if he can't pay back the money on time.

### 1 Read the introduction to the story. Then tick the boxes.

- |                                   | Yes                      | No                                  |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Antonio is poor.                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Antonio's money is in the bank. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 3 Bassanio wants to find a wife.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 4 Shylock likes Antonio.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| 5 Bassanio must sign a paper.     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

### 2 What do you think will happen if Antonio can't pay Shylock on time? Can you guess?

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1 Antonio must leave Venice.           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Antonio must die.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Antonio must give Shylock his house. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Bassanio must pay Shylock.           | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## CHAPTER 1 Money for a friend

**O**ur story starts many years ago when Venice was a very rich and important city. In those days lots of Venetian ships crossed the Mediterranean Sea to North Africa and the East. Venetian captains bought many beautiful things abroad, and they took them back home to sell in Venetian shops. One of the most important men in Venice at that time was Antonio, who was a very rich merchant. Antonio had many friends in the city of Venice, but his best friend of all was Bassanio.

Bassanio was a handsome young man from a good family, but he wasn't rich. When Bassanio's father died, he left Bassanio only a little money, and Bassanio had spent it all. Antonio, the Merchant of Venice, was a kind and generous man. From time to time, because he was a good friend to Bassanio, he gave money to the young man to help him when things were difficult for him.

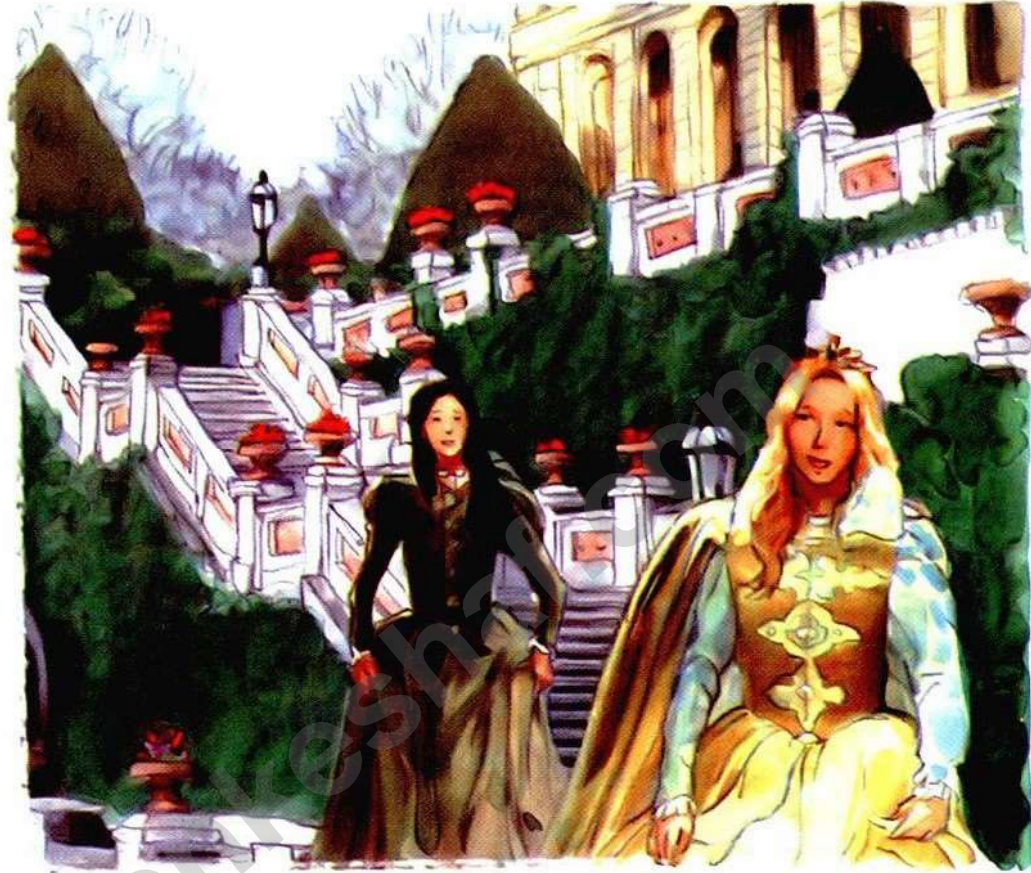
**buy** (*past bought*) to give money for something

**sell** (*past sold*) to take money for something

**merchant** this man buys and sells things







Bassanio wanted to marry Portia, a young Venetian woman from a good family. Portia was good and beautiful, and because her old father had died not long ago, she was a very rich young woman, too. Portia was the old man's only daughter, and her mother had died when Portia was a young child. So Portia now had all her father's money and she lived in an enormous house in the country. Because of this, lots of young men visited Portia to ask her to marry them. From England, Scotland, France, Germany and Naples they came to Portia's house in Belmont. They went there with many servants, and they gave her lots of expensive presents.

Bassanio didn't have enough money to do this, and he felt miserable about that. For the time being, Portia had not agreed to marry anybody, but Bassanio was worried that she would soon be tired of saying 'no' and would

marry to make  
somebody your  
wife, or husband

agree to say yes

say 'yes' to somebody.

So Bassanio went to ask Antonio for his help. Antonio was delighted to see his young friend.

'How are you?' he said with a smile. 'You must tell me all about this young woman that you want to marry.'

So Bassanio told Antonio about his plans. 'I think that Portia likes me,' he finished. 'And if I can visit her wearing beautiful new clothes, with lots of servants and lots of expensive presents for her, maybe she'll agree to marry me. But I have no money left. So could you lend me some money to help me visit Portia and ask her to marry me? If I don't do it soon, I'm worried that some rich man will go there before me and ask Portia to marry him, and that she'll agree to it.'

Smiling, Antonio answered his friend, 'Bassanio, I'd love to help you, but I've got no money right now. All that I have is in my ships at sea: one has gone to Tripoli, another to Lisbon, a third to England, a fourth to India and a fifth to Mexico. Now I'm waiting for them all to return. When they do, I'll be three times richer than I was before, and I can give you all the money that you want.'

Then he saw the sad look in Bassanio's eyes, and, feeling sorry for the young man, he said, 'Don't worry, my friend. Because you need the money now, I'll borrow it from Shylock and give it to you today. I want you to marry Portia and be happy.'

Shylock the moneylender was very rich. He lent money to people and made them pay back more than they had borrowed. He loved money more than anything – more than his family and more than his friends. But he wasn't a very popular man in Venice, and he didn't have many friends, because he was so mean. He hated spending

**lend** (*past lent*) to give for a short time

**borrow** to take for a short time

**moneylender** this man's job is to lend money to people

**pay** (*past paid*) to give money to somebody



money on things. He wasn't even kind to his only daughter, Jessica. She never went outside the house, and Shylock's house was always very cold inside. His wife, Leah, had died years before, so Jessica did all the housework for her father. She cleaned and cooked, washed and tidied for him. Her father never said 'thank you' to her for all her hard work. He didn't give her much money or much food to eat. And he never bought her any new clothes, so the poor girl had to wear her mother's old things.

Shylock hated Antonio, because Antonio sometimes lent money to friends for free, and this was very bad for Shylock's business. So he was waiting for the right time to hurt Antonio if he could.

That afternoon Antonio went with Bassanio to see Shylock. He asked the moneylender if he could borrow 3000 gold coins from him.

'When all my ships come back to Venice, I can give you your money back,' he said. 'I don't often lend money. And I never borrow money for myself. But Bassanio, my best friend, has asked me for help when I don't have any money to hand. So I'd like to borrow this sum from you now, if you agree.'

At first Shylock wasn't very happy with the plan. 'What will happen if all your ships cross dangerous waters and sink in storms at sea before they return to Venice? You won't have the money to pay me.'

Then he had an idea and smiled. 'Look. Let's be friends,' he said to Antonio. 'I'll be glad to lend you this money for free. You're a kind and generous man, and I want to show you that I can be as kind and generous as you are. But for a joke, I've got an idea, and maybe you can agree to it. My idea is this: if you can't pay me back the money that I

business work

**joke** a thing you say or do to make people laugh